

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-08 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-04 INR-05

LAB-01 NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 AID-05 OMB-01 DODE-00

PM-03 H-01 L-01 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 DRC-01 /073 W

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R 181116Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1207

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 7894

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, LA

SUBJ: ELECTRICITE DU LAOS STRIKE

REF: VIENTIANE 7806

BEGIN SUMMARY: LABOR DISPUTE AT ELECTRICITE DU LAOS (EDL) ENTERED ITS FOURTH DAY. OCTOBER 18 AFTER "SETTLEMENT" ANNOUNCED OCTOBER 16 CAME UNSTUCK. THERE HAS BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT DISRUPTION OF POWER SUPPLY, HOWEVER. MAJORITY OF EDL WORKERS REMAIN LOYAL TO EDL'S DIRECTOR GENERAL, WHO HAS BEEN SUSPENDED, AND SENIOR VIENTIANE SIDE OFFICIALS IN OTHER AGENCIES HAVE REGISTERED CONCERN AT SPREADING PATTERN OF AGITATION DIRECTED AT SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS. END SUMMARY

1. THE LIGHTS ARE STILL ON IN VIENTIANE DESPITE THE FACT THAT ON OCTOBER 18 THE "STRIKE" AT ELECTRICITE DU LAOS (EDL) ENTERED ITS FOURTH DAY. A SETTLEMENT WAS ANNOUNCED ON OCTOBER 16, BUT THE ANNOUNCEMENT PROVED TO BE PREMATURE.

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THE MAIN PROBLEM APPEARS TO BE THAT THE STRIKE IS NOT A

STRIKE AT ALL IN THE NORMAL SENSE OF THE WORD. FEWER THAN 100 OF EDL'S APPROXIMATELY 1,400 WORKERS SEEM TO HAVE BACKED THE WORK STOPPAGE WHICH BEGAN ON OCTOBER 14. THIS SMALL MINORITY OF WORKERS HAS BEEN JOINED BY "OUTSIDE AGITATORS" IN OCCUPYING THE EDL'S MAIN OFFICES AND ITS POWER PLANT/TRAINING SCHOOL. THE OUTSIDERS APPEAR TO BE A MIXED GROUP COMPRISING STUDENTS, LEADERS FROM THE LAO FEDERATION OF LABOR, WORKERS FROM ROYAL AIR LAO AND THE WATER WORKS. THEY HAVE PREVENTED WORKERS WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE BE INCLINED TO DO SO FROM RETURNING TO THEIR JOBS. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, NORMAL ELECTRIC SERVICE HAS BEEN MAINTAINED AND CONSTRUCTION BY CONTRACTOR CREWS FROM SIEMENS AND MITSUI HAS CONTINUED.

2. ON OCTOBER 16, ACCORDING TO THE OCTOBER 17 VIENTIANE POST, THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, SINGKAPO CHOUNRAMANY, (PATHET LAO), AND THE MINISTRY'S SECRETARY OF STATE, HOUMPHANH SAIGRASITH, ANNOUNCED THAT KHAM SING NGONVORARAT, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF EDL HAD BEEN PLACED ON LEAVE. HIS REMOVAL HAD BEEN THE MAJOR DEMAND OF THE "STRIKERS." THE STRIKE, CONCLUDED THE VIENTIANE POST, WAS OVER.

3. THE MINISTER'S CAPITULATION CAUSED AN IMMEDIATE STRONG REACTION FROM SECOND-LEVEL MANAGEMENT OF EDL AND FROM SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS THROUGHOUT THE GOVERNMENT. THE LATTER, AS A GROUP, HAVE BEEN DISTURBED BY THE PATTERN DEVELOPED DURING SEVERAL RECENT LABOR DISPUTES IN WHICH WORKERS HAVE DEMANDED THAT DIRECTORS OR OTHER SUPERVISORS BE REMOVED AND THE PGNU HAS COMPLIED, AT LEAST TO EXTENT OF SUSPENDING THE SENIOR EMPLOYEES WHO ARE UNDER ACCUSATION. THEY SEE THIS TREND AS A PATHET LAO EFFORT TO ELIMINATE THE UPPER-LEVEL MANAGEMENT OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AND ALSO, PRESUMABLY, AS A THREAT TO THEIR OWN POSITIONS.

4. THE DIRECTORS AND SECTION CHIEFS AT EDL REFUSED TO RETURN TO WORK AND PUBLISHED STATEMENTS ATTACKING SINGKAPO'S DECISION REGARDING KHAM SING. AN OPEN LETTER, SIGNED BY SENIOR AND MIDDLE-LEVEL CIVIL SERVANTS THROUGHOUT THE GOVERNMENT (REPORTEDLY COORDINATED BY THE YOUNG IDEAS PARTY) WAS SENT TO NEWSPAPERS ON OCTOBER 17 (A COPY WAS DELIVERED
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TO THE AMBASSADOR ON OCTOBER 18), ALSO ATTACKING THE DECISION AND THE PGNU'S GENERAL POSTURE REGARDING LABOR UNREST. THE GOVERNMENT'S SPOKESMAN, IN AN OCTOBER 18 NEWS CONFERENCE, ON THE CABINET'S OCTOBER 17 MEETING, SAID THE LETTER HAD JUST BEEN RECEIVED AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD STUDY ITS DEMANDS.

5. THE PATHET LAO HAVE BEEN ACTIVE DURING THIS STRIKE.

THE EDL MAIN OFFICE IS CONVENIENTLY ACROSS THE STREET FROM PL'S VIENTIANE HEADQUARTERS. PL HAVE PROVIDED FOOD, BEVERAGES AND NEWS BULLETINS TO THE "STRIKERS." THE PATHET LAO NEWS AGENCY, IN AN UNUSUALLY QUICK REACTION, ON OCTOBER 15 ISSUED A STATEMENT (FBIS/D 151039 OCT 15) BACKING THE "STRIKERS" IN THEIR PROTEST "AGAINST OPPRESSION AND THE ILL-TREATMENT BY THE DIRECTORS."

6. THE GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN, ON OCTOBER 18, ANNOUNCED THAT THE CABINET HAD GIVEN SINGKAPO AND HOUMPHANH AUTHORITY TO SETTLE THE STRIKE AND HAD ALSO ORDERED THAT ANY SABOTAGE OF THE ELECTRIC SYSTEM BE INVESTIGATED AND THE PERPETRATORS PUNISHED. THERE WAS SOME SABOTAGE ON THE NIGHT OF OCTOBER 16 WHICH CAUSED MOST OF THE LIGHTS AT THE THAT LUANG FAIR TO GO OUT. THE SPOKESMAN MADE NO MENTION OF SINGKAPO'S EARLIER DECISION REGARDING KAHMSING.

7. THE SCENE AT THE EDL MAIN BUILDING ON OCTOBER 18 IS CALM. THE MIXED POLICE ARE FRATERNIZING WITH THE "STRIKERS," DRINKING PATHET LAO-SUPPLIED PEPSI AND TAKING THEIR EASE. THE GENERAL GAIETY OF THE CITY OCCASIONED BY THE THAT LUANG FAIR DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN LESSENEED.

8. WHEN THE DIRECTORS AND SECTION CHIEFS WILL RETURN TO WORK IS DIFFICULT TO SAY. IT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY DEPEND ON HOW SINGKAPO AND HOUMPHANH DISCHARGE THEIR MANDATE, PARTICULARLY THEIR DECISION REGARDING KHAMHSING. THE FACT THAT KHAMHSING AND HOUMPHANH, WHO -- AS A MEMBER OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE -- WOULD NORMALLY BE EXPECTED TO ADVOCATE HIS SUBORDINATE'S INTERESTS, DETEST EACH OTHER WILL NO DOUBT ADD TO THE DIFFICULTY OF THE SITUATION.
WHITEHOUSE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LABOR STRIKES, STRIKE SETTLEMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 OCT 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: shawdg
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974VIENTI07894
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740298-0196
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741033/aaaabcbh.tel
Line Count: 146
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: VIENTIANE 7806
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: shawdg
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <30 APR 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <19 MAR 2003 by shawdg>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ELECTRICITE DU LAOS STRIKE
TAGS: ELAB, LA, ELECTRICITE DU LOAS, EDL
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005